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National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

April 10, 2003

The Honorable Michael Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Powell:

It is my understanding that the FCC is conducting a second review of the transition to digital television (MB Docket No. 03-15). During this review, I encourage you to consider the needs of rural Americans, who consistently get diminished access to new technology.

The digital divide separates rural America from our wealthier, urban and suburban neighbors. The rollout of DTV has been steady, but there seems to be an imaginary bubble around rural areas, isolating us from progress in new technology.

Many broadcasters contribute to this isolation, because they appear unwilling or unable to broadcast signals at an adequate strength. Technology needs to be more accessible to Americans from all income levels and all regions of the country.

Only one quarter of the nation's 1,304 broadcast stations are broadcasting digital signals at full power. Weak signals have a more difficult time traveling longer distances and reaching rural communities, so rural families have diminished reception capabilities.

Broadcasters should be compelled to broadcast their signals at full strength, so that all areas can move forward during the early stages of the transition to digital television. As you have said, digital television is an important new technology that offers the American public exciting new ways to obtain information.

I urge you to take action to ensure that rural Americans have as much of a chance as their neighbors in obtaining access to digital television.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Respectfully yours,

Paul Clark, National President